

Research report

**Musical progressions: A multi-modal approach
in healing from bipolar disorder**

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Abstract. *This self-narrative examines the various engagements that changed this researcher from being an ill person to exploring her musical and creative self. This article follows the method of autoethnographic inquiry in which evidences from personal history, which coincided with 18 years with bipolar disorder is shared from internet sites by the researcher, where such links are in a public domain, for anyone to access. In this span of time, she worked with many aspects of music, to the point that from a state of emotional chaos there emerged an order. Examining creativity as an idea and corroborating from Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration, this article illustrates how the current researcher is no longer someone living with a serious mental illness, but a person who got healed and became an artist, researcher and entrepreneur. While some of this is ascribed to the divergent thinking that is attributed to bipolar disorder, she explicates how one musical engagement led to another and brought about her recovery, though none of it had started with a therapeutic goal. What constitutes recovery in mental illness is also elaborated.*

Keywords: Poetry, musical composition, Indian *ragas*, bipolar disorder, auto-ethnography, recovery, narrative, creativity, divergent thinking, Dabrowski.

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INTRODUCTION According to Nicol (2006), personal stories illuminate the particular while also hinting at the universal in its many variations. Though this article is a personal narrative, its universality lies in the possibility of musical healing that it documents, which could be available to anyone who can utilize music in its variations as a means for catharsis, self-renewal and self-expression. Affirming Nicol's view, Brown and colleagues (2001) remind us that the utility of music in clinical and caregiving situations is well established. I not only set out to corroborate this, but also illustrate the utility of music and creativity as a process which may help in self-healing, and someone can accomplish it, even from a condition as debilitating and long term, as bipolar disorder – the manner I could.

Tyson (2010) believed that music could offer a bridge from the inner world to an outer reality, and provide the only means to give expression, to inner feelings in a safe way. For someone experiencing mental suffering, to give way to their distress by a musical expression is not only an act of redirecting the suffering, but may amount to establishing connection with their environment in ways that are socially legitimate and empowering, rather than keeping the focus on their identity derived from a disabling illness. However, for such change to occur, the first condition is that there should have been early exposure to musical training, and not spontaneous musical expressions as might occur sometimes in people in euphoric states of mania. An early start of musical training in a person's life can create unexpected therapeutic outcomes. By a multi-modal approach, I refer to various pursuits coalesced

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and transformed one person in many ways. By way of this writing, I document all the trajectories on which I worked, and investigate how this can be accomplished by others.

I wish to invite my potential readers into my story which, as unlikely as it may occasionally sound, is about the beauty and excitement of life and fascination with human thought. I also hope to invite my readers to participate in my journey through the lost sense of self, the fruitfulness of experiencing temporary fragmentation of identity, and my growth in questioning the narratives I learned to live by (Souminen, 2003).

MATERIALS To refer back to events that started to happen over a span of two decades, memory alone cannot be relied upon. Therefore, I have depended on resources accumulated over a period of time, to arrive at my analysis. My first memory of writing (**Note 1**) goes back to poetry, which I have in notebooks, in my possession. Memory is aided by publications in newspapers and an arts' magazine that I began my career with (**Note 2**). In the latter, I had written my first 'professional' article, based on an interview and research, about Kumar Gandharva (KG). KG was an icon in the field of Hindustani Classical Music and given a diagnosis of tuberculosis in his early twenties, from which he miraculously recovered, to become one of the greatest artists of his times, and for the future of the classical music tradition of India.

Even though the illness of KG was different from mine, I found his quest via musical expression somewhat similar and it became an inspiration to me. By delving into his ideas, which I culled from many directions, both artistically and philosophically, I tried to spiritually connect with him during my early twenties, in an effort to look for something within music which would help me heal. Instead I got connected to some of the poetry that he used in his singing- Kabir's (**Note 3**) and I found for myself a means with which I could communicate with God and with the world, to express my pain and give it an expression via songs. There were other factors whose role cannot be underestimated, like family support, my dogs, a switch in medication to homeopathy (terminated in 2013), gardening and living alone. I am not in a position to do justice to any of them through this article.

There are musical references (**Note 4**) that I have cited here. Some of these are recordings that were recorded in a studio and sold publicly (**Note 5**), and once the Internet became the means for it, shared by a music lover, on YouTube. I became a radio artist, by auditions, in two categories of music, in the year 2004. To aid memory, I have letters and, in some cases photographs, from government bodies, non-profits and other organizations inviting me for talks, performances and workshops. I also have copies of invitations from organizations inviting me for concerts and performances - in India and overseas (**Note 6**).

My research publications started appearing in 2004, link to which are provided. This comprises the resources I have utilized, for the current study.

METHODS

Autoethnography

I frame my analysis in an intriguing and promising qualitative method (Wall, 2008) called autoethnography, an emerging methodological field within health research (Denshire & Lee, 2013). Frank (1997) suggests that a person who has lived chaos can only be responsible to that experience retrospectively, when distance allows reflection and some narrative ordering of temporality. An important assumption held by autoethnographers and qualitative researchers in general is that reality is neither fixed nor entirely external but is created by, and moves with, the changing perceptions and beliefs of the viewer. This subjective view, often criticized from a positivistic standpoint, has gradually come to be seen as an acceptable platform for the practice of research (Duncan, 2004). In the ethnographic tradition, which emerged from anthropological inquiry, instead of viewing and studying cultural 'outsiders' the attempt to study populations one could connect with at multiple levels, reduced

the distance between the researcher and the subject of research. Ethnographers would situate themselves within the same location as those they would study to comprehend the complexities and subjectivities of their lives.

This narrowing of distance between researcher and research participant, reaches a minimum with autoethnography. 'In terms of underlying epistemology, this shift represents a major divergence from traditional empiricism. All these traditions make a clear separation between the observer and the observed, subject and object...Autoethnography serves as a significant alternative, as there is no subject/object split.' (Gergen, 2014)

How easy can it be to express your own chaos, even on hindsight? This is the challenge of doing autoethnography. If a pathway was chanced upon by an intermingling of ideas or situations, I attempt to further dissect it, to scrutinize whether a method lay in it accidentally. Being a researcher, I return back to my story in different ways, to discern newer shades, as I try to analyze my self-healing through music, among other things, yet again. I use one element, for instance musical training, to bring together several sides of my work, and try to document how creativity got harnessed towards a meaningful end. Creativity is an innate part of every human being, which when channelized through a disciplined and long-term training regimen, can create pathways where none exist. It may even be targeted toward long-term wellness, instead of keeping people permanently ill.

An intention for finding a method in one person's experience if there could be one, and attempting to generate something meaningful for the world, instead of writing their narratives as autobiography makes researchers do autoethnography. This method is an application of postmodern philosophy, which questions normative assumptions and legitimates alternative understandings for knowledge creation. In this ethnographic form, the self becomes the subject of the study, and as Stanley (in Holt, 2003) pointedly says, autoethnography is not simply limited to the self because people do not accumulate their experiences in a social vacuum. When a person, as the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, it also accounts for the conditions of its emergence. That creates scope for becoming a social theorist (Butler, 2005). Autoethnography offers a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding, of any phenomenon in question (Wall, 2008).

Richards (2008) distinguishes autoethnography into three styles: testimonies, emancipatory discourses, and destabilizing narratives. My article is a testimony of how using various artistic, intellectual and expressive resources I had access to, I molded a new path of healing for myself, which was not mediated by an external guiding agent, in significant parts (**Note 7**). An autoethnography germinates from a person's ability to introspect. Only with such acumen can the private contribute any meaning to the social, as a sociological technique, that starts from self and may become useful for understanding the complex, ambiguous, and processual nature of lived emotional experience (Ellis, 2009). Frank (1997) affirms that its desire is to touch others and perhaps to make a difference in the unfolding of their stories.

The arts and mental health

The arts lend themselves to many possibilities in the context of disability, from occupational to therapeutic outcomes. The scope of the performing arts and artistic expression is so malleable that it can be utilized by every person one way or another. Parr (2006) confirms that the association between the arts and mental health is currently being reconfigured, especially in ways that signal the potential role of the arts in minimizing difference - through helping to ensure communication, recovery and inclusion for those with serious mental health problems. My life also followed this template - it began with a quest expression, which became my communication and then lead to recovery, which I define as reclaiming various roles and responsibilities in the world, like any other.

Jamison (1994) reminds us that there are several ways to examine the relationship between mood disorders, or affective illness, and artistic creativity. Research is replete with biographies of artists, writers, musicians and poets who suffered from moods of a disabling nature, including many who even attempted self-harm. Often research follows the custom of gleaning from historical, biographical, autobiographical accounts that are written about or by individuals. Life study investigations, through

historical analyses from biographical accounts, have been among the most prominent of these methods. That leaves the only option of studying artistic creativity to be twofold – either a self-account by an artist or an account by a researcher. What is followed here is the latter.

FORMING A MUSICAL BRAID: GLIMPSES OF PERSONAL HISTORY

A braid requires different strands to weave a pattern. Mine had music, poetry and musical composition - woven together as a musical braid. But the texture of this braid is not a musical one alone - it is defined by my temperament to read profusely, ponder, and re-search. There are two salient points here - the age at which I started learning music, which was ten years, and the other is age 20 at which I was given a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. In other words, when I was discovered 'psychotic', I had been learning music for at least a decade, encouraged by parents to pursue music outside of school hours.

Upon getting a diagnosis for bipolar, I became emotionally paralyzed for long, as my mind/body tried tuning to anti-psychotics, then mood stabilizers, which produced many co-morbidities, in particular hypothyroidism within the first year. I gained weight, lost confidence, became a social recluse, avoided company, became extremely non-verbal and, had no contact with anyone for years. Whatever contact was, remained within the domain of music, yet not continuously. That was the time, I started writing poetry. It was a difficult time of adjustment to a new life, as I was suddenly out of the college milieu where I was studying, until then. For weeks and months I would remain in great mental fogs and melancholia. I could not understand what happened, why the communication with the world suddenly snapped or how to restore it.

I felt as though some deep-seated suffering had burst from within. It felt like an accumulation that would have grown over years, and started pouring out through poetry first of all. This was a contrast to the sort of elation and lightness I would feel during states of euphoria that accompanied a swing in the other direction- the manic one, which I experienced many a time in my life. When I look back at psychosis today, I am still enamored by its energy and scope yet fearful of its frenzy. It was impossible to contain the burst of ideas, for the psychic turbulence it would release would be like a high tide gushing with an enormous power and crashing me on the rocks, leaving me breathless, and enervated for months after.

A fabric of life interwoven with music

It was never by design that I took to music, nor was it intended as a therapy. It was a part of life, for musical training was imparted to all children in my family, in addition to regular education. I did it perforce initially and then out of habit. During a certain phase there was no other reason to leave home, except for the bi-weekly music class. Liberman *et al* (in McReynolds, 2002) emphasize upon comprehensive psychiatric rehabilitation programs, combined with effective medication management to help individuals meet the challenges of managing their disabling illnesses. Without designing such a program deliberately, music became a part of my rehabilitation.

However much I would be languishing, I would drag myself to go, learn music. Once upon a time it was to the home of one teacher, then to a school of music in a master's program, thereafter to the home of another guru. I do not recall whether it was the joy of singing, or the inner urge to engage in something, or the need to look socially well adjusted that pushed me to such length. Dalal (2011) also believes that much of the personal initiative to manage one's own disease depends on the way one understands the experience of illness. I never believed that bipolar was meant to disable me. To reach the home of one my teachers I would drive 35 kilometers, but I persisted tenaciously. I wonder what it was through those songs that I sought to express. Singing provided a many-sided outlet: a framework to sit for practice every day, a reason to leave home for a meaningful activity, a possibility of social exchange with another human, usually my teacher, and many other tools for rehabilitation. The challenge of practicing new musical compositions would somehow take away from the bleakness, which would otherwise afflict me deeply. Storr (1992) reminds about Nietzsche, who believed that

music was one of the arts which so sharpened our sense of participation in life that it gave meaning to life and made it worth living.

Whatever else happened, music kept propelling me. I would go to my teachers (**Note 8**) and request them to teach me songs, even trying to choose them for myself, though it was considered quite unthinkable. If there would be *ragas* (**Note 9**) whose notes I could not connect with, nobody forced me to learn them. One of my teachers, whose teaching became one of the pillars of my musical learning, would even sometimes judge my moods and teach me *khayals* (**Note 10**) accordingly. 'Music and songs seem to have this kind of function because music says much more than mere words... This gives the suffering individual "a symbolic distance" to his/her problems. Music shows new possibilities and gives extra energy for the psychic work needed to solving problems' (Lehtonen, 2005).

However, it was the poetic within the musical which was significant for me, not necessarily the music by itself. I wonder if I had been playing an instrument and not singing, whether the music would have had the same impact. Or what if I had not been working with poetry and composing music? Frequently in those days, I sought musical expressions to my inner turmoil, for I knew that with psychiatric medication I could go only thus far. One has to go on, the central existential theme of human life no matter if you are ready for it or not, affirms Lehtonen (2005). I accepted my suffering as a 'given' in my life, but I would not concede to it and become completely incapacitated. I still had to live my life, with whatever challenges it brought.

Healing through poetry

Though I started learning music as a pre-teen, it was easier to become a poet than a musician. Musical training was a long-winding road, whereas poetry was spontaneous. My written expression was in English, whereas all musical work would be within our classical music tradition, which was in Hindi (**Note 11**) in the beginning. In other words, communicating my inner pain became a full scale engagement with me, while multiple modes became the means for it.

In my poetic expression, the first pieces I wrote, expressed my personal suffering. In nearly eight or nine years of writing that way, I decided to distance myself from the endless moping, or the personal anger that I seemed to express then. Due to ongoing education, I would always be studying something, so I remained attuned to the goings-on of the world around. I start tuning out of myself, in an attempt to see my connection with the world. Then I would write to inspire myself in many a poem, one of which was:

*O poets what wilt thee leave behind
For mankind, that mere words can build?
Will thee merely, blacken sheets of paper
With the dark imaginings of thine turbid brains,
'N leave them behind, in the name of poesy?*

*O thee have not schools, nor universities to build!
Neither homes of hope, institutions of charity
Hospitals, big dams, or bridges or laboratories...
So add a drop o' life
To this smoldering ocean that chokes
'N fumes b'neath the staggering burden of humankind*

*O poets, leave not that which shall tease those to come
Leave babbling brooks, replete with rays of a new hope
O poets dream the impossible dreams and weave
Them into a necklace of words such
That thine dreams, become the dreams of a world torn asunder
Leave not weeping sagas, of thine own (personal pain)
For many a soul in such a one languishes -
Hold their hands, fire their hearts, leave behind, if you can,
A ray of sun, after the tearing rain.*

(13th July 1999, unpublished poetry)

For several years I lived between a world of musical notes and poetry, battling moods, which would suddenly become unbearable, compounded by loneliness. It should be no surprise that, when I found my self-expression inadequate, I turned to the poetry of others. The inner turmoil did not seem to find an adequate outlet, barring small interludes where I could occupy myself in either music or writing, but never more than a couple of hours a day (**Note 12**). Nietzsche believed that the creative process was stimulated by adversity, more especially ill/health. Perhaps he would have appreciated the link between manic-depressive illness and creativity, suggest Goodwin & Jamison (in Storr, 1992).

Becoming a composer

I engaged with poetry in many languages and it was accidental. Equally accidentally I tried to set some of the spiritual and devotional poetry into music, without being trained for it. I had arrived at the next stage of musical acumen - from learning musical scales to creating melodies within them. But there were no benchmarks, except for the musical greats, in particular KG. I dared not go and discuss my compositions with my teachers, for fear of being rebuffed. I had no friends to share or discuss musical ideas with. The only options available were my poetry, my music, the poetry of other poets and my instruments. I never shared new compositions with anyone for years altogether, feeling there may be nobody interested, barring my family, which would support me in any case.

Bhajan led to Ghazal (Note 13)

At 27 years of age, when I accidentally turned for musical composition to the poetry of Kabir (**Note 14**) from the 16th century India I found, as though a direct link to communicate with God, for it had diverse elements that met my emotional needs for the moment. Kabir was a man who was an iconoclast, and a rebel, who defied social oppression, mocked people for their religiosity and challenged them to know the god that lay within all. Lacking enough musical compositions that would express an inner sense of dejection within my existing repertoire, I turned to his poetry at early and started to set it to music. Through his poetry, I found a communication in a mental-emotional-spiritual domain, even if it did not evoke a response from any. Luhrmann (2013) believes that the capacity to build this relationship and to experience its effects rests on a learned cultivation of the imagination: to make what is (or must be) imagined more real and to make it more “good”. Elaborating further Lehtonen (2005) suggests that binding process means that the psychic tension or anxiety diminishes while its restless psychic energy gets bound in the creative musical experiences. My stress would diminish considerably when I could express it out to that entity who I would communicate with, via Kabir’s poetry and my music.

With the encouragement of my family, I created a musical album of four CDs, which was also released in a small concert, and got a little media publicity, which was not altogether bad for me, not that it gave me the boost I required to any considerable degree. But it saved me, in some measure, from crumbling under the setback of the failure of my first marriage. As the album got heard around, many liked it and appreciated my effort, while for the first time I was awoken to my artistic personhood, instead of my illness identity.

Around that time, I encountered one person who pointed out to me that my voice was well suited for the Urdu *ghazal*, and I ought to attempt it. But the idea of *ghazal* that I had in mind was somewhat stereotypical and determined by the prevalent ideas of it then. He came home to meet me and share the spirituality of the poetry with me. He was a professor of mathematics and an Urdu poet too. Listening to him and having discussions with him, I started looking at the *ghazal* with a different view. One of the significant barriers to expressing myself via the *ghazal* was its language, whose milieu was unfamiliar to me, even though traditionally my grandparents knew the language proficiently. So how was I to re-create that link once again? I got down to reading translated versions of Urdu poetry in Hindi. Urdu pronunciation itself is somewhat different from other Indian languages, and it was initially difficult for me, for there were sounds that I had never encountered at all.

The attraction for that form of poetry was instantly established. While *bhakti* poetry was an expression of communication with an invisible divine, who I could both complain to, and weep in front of, it was not something I could really express other emotions such as grief, joy or dejection through. However

great *bhakti* poetry be, it could not cover the entire gamut of human emotions, especially not the suffering of a soul in depressions. That expression came from the *ghazal*. Quentzel and Loewy (2010) also concur that musicians and performing artists give voice to the full spectrum of human experience, including physical, emotional, and spiritual domains of function. With *ghazal* now added to my repertoire, I reached a stage of expression where an entire spectrum of my emotions could be expressed, within one or another musical genre.

Experiencing the universal in the personal

From time immemorial humans have captured their suffering through poetry. When I wrote, my poetry represented personal suffering. But when I saw a similar suffering reflected from the poetry of others, I knew that even though I was momentarily solitary, I was not alone in my suffering nor it was unique in any way. To be able to see the continuum of human suffering, and not just wallow in your personal, creates a new horizon that everyone needs to visualize. Lehtonen (2005) believes that songs tell touching stories about grief and suffering belonging to all human life. Many songs seem to say also that the suffering individual is not alone and there will always be somebody who is going to lend a helping hand or who is on one's side. These pieces seem to give a suffering individual hope by gaining an empathetic promise that somebody has already gone through the same kind of hard times and even the most severe problems can be solved. "This refers to as "validation" – the idea that others have shared the same suffering" (Lehtonen, 2005).

In setting those Urdu *ghazals* to musical scores, I not only set myself on another path of musical expression, but also on a pathway of getting my pain out of my personal 'bounded being' (**Note 15**) into a more universal domain, and in effect connect with the continuum of human experience across time and language. The first *ghazal* that I sang was composed by my father, who would often tease me to learn his musical compositions, perhaps in order to challenge me, so that I would take it up and 'prove' myself. So sometimes I would take up the challenge and sometimes I would ignore it. However, slowly my *ghazal* repertoire began to expand as well and I cut another musical album (**Note 16**), which was not released commercially though.

Nicol (2006) believes that a musician represents the score but the score also represents the musician. On the one hand I would sing the poetry to give a vent to my pain, and represent the poetry, at times publicly. However, the score would equally represent me, and the audience never knew the difference. As students of music we are well accustomed to musical practice, *riyaz* (**Note 17**), as part of which we sing a song repeatedly to perfect it. Therefore, while doing *riyaz*, I would get so absorbed by the idea of perfecting it, that the initial reason of finding an outlet for the pain itself would get transformed into pure musical expression.

The seesaw act I performed

It is extremely difficult to work in any artistic or creative activity on the two extremes of depression and mania, for one is unlikely to even remain functional. A turbid mind does not hold anything for long enough to achieve coherence. But if someone has a musical repertoire already it may find an outlet and become expression of a suffering spirit. Ready (2011) agrees that for patients with psychosis, music can serve as a mediating and metabolizing function to help digest raw or unsettling emotional material.

Somewhere in this seesaw of moods, music helped me gradually, over time, to assist me become a different person than the one who was afflicted by severe mood states. Only over time, when I saw that my musical repertoire, writing, and musical compositions grew to such an extent that the qualitative shift became impossible to miss. This slow progression, one day at a time, often with days where no progress would happen, over time brought about a transition in my illness experience.

Alone mostly

Today as I pen these words, the dominant image of my past is a life of solitude, silence and suffering for most parts. Had I not known the experience of 'psychosis' I would have thought I suffered from a

severe depression, which would even make me contemplate suicide to put an end to the agony. Like any other patient with depression, I was engulfed in self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and low positive reappraisal, as pointed out by Punkanen and colleagues (2011). A significant source of self-esteem for every human, is gainful employment which makes them financially solvent. In the absence of an ability to pay your own bills, everyone suffers immensely, notwithstanding creativity. Often these situations further compound depressions, because musical work is not something meant for the solitude of your soul, but an outward expression in the world. So though music helped me express myself, it did not yet pay my bills. Writing about the composer Robert Schumann, Jamison (1994) notes, that when most depressed he produced least, and when hypomanic he produced a remarkable level. The fluctuations in his musical productivity over the years were extreme. I had a similar pattern, for composition or even musical practice would cease completely in those months when I would be in the grips of depressions. They usually lasted long, making me doubt whether I could even call myself a musician.

However much your musical repertoire, the real yardstick for an artist is artistic recognition. Frank (1997) confirms that the problem of being seriously ill becomes the problem of finding a voice. At many levels this is the quest of anyone who recovers from a long spell of disabling illnesses of the mind. I must acknowledge the fact that being alone was therapeutic in many ways, for it gave me time to indulge in self expression, which the presence of others would not bring about, for then I would be expected to engage in dialogues that I had no scope to muster from my suffering spirit. But carving a new identity post recovery is a challenge everyone has to accept, for there are no shortcuts.

Music became therapy

As a musician I engaged in music at so many levels that I did not realize when it became therapeutic, bringing about a psychic transformation and then change in my identity from someone chronically ill and debilitated to someone always doing one or another thing in music - *riyaaaz*, composing a new song, teaching a student, writing a research paper in music psychology or planning a lecture in music therapy advocacy. A lot of this activity was also generated by pushing myself to go and talk to others, but some of it has also come to me from the world around. 'Music therapy is also recommended for the rehabilitation of patients who have difficulty in expressing their feelings and communicating with others' (Alridge, 1994). I see that this multi-modal musical engagement has transformed me completely, and has opened doors to the outside world in ways I never imagined.

In many ways, while the brain interpreted music, successive biochemical reactions were also induced within the body (Gangrade, 2012), which possibly changed the dominant mood states from melancholia to creative expressions. The analysis of those biochemical changes are, of course, beyond my ability but anyone who knows me, cannot associate me with any long-term illness of that nature as I experienced. I am not suggesting that music or musical expression alone by themselves can become therapeutic, more so for musicians.

Music not therapy for musicians always

Every layperson finds a therapeutic value in musical activity - whether it be active or passive engagement with music. There was a well-known musician who committed suicide a few years ago and I happened to meet her a few years before she did so. When I met her, I found her extremely disturbed, and emotionally volatile that made me nervous, and tremble inside. I had gone to meet her to learn music after a pursuit of many years.

A few years after that meeting, when I heard the news of her sudden death, I was troubled for a long time, as here was someone who was among the best artists of her generation and she had been driven to such a point. That incident made me ponder whether musical engagement would necessarily be therapeutic for musicians? Or why would it become therapeutic for one and not another? Or if it were a therapy innately, in what case it became therapeutic and in what case not?

From her suicide, I could see contrarily. For what reason did it become therapeutic for me? Is it because my musical work was not performance driven and focuses on looking for solutions to problems via music or is it because I myself wanted to take music as a therapy to others? Or is it that in my own

expressions, I was focused more on venting; letting it represent my suffering first, before taking that expression to concert audiences? The limitation of music as a mode of therapy for musicians is quite clear to me, for being tied to occupational and social outcomes, it may not automatically prove therapeutic, because one is so much into music that its efficacy as a healing mechanism is vastly diminished. Neither can I say that music by itself was therapeutic for me, for it produced a great measure of anxiety as well, due to its occupational demands or uncertainties, which every musician experiences - more so when we wait for concerts and performances to come our way. Possibly musicians would additionally need to work with psychologists and therapists if they have to recover from any serious illness themselves, and not just leave it to music. I personally see the role of the many other variables as contributors to my recovery, equally as much as music.

Harnessing creativity

Today my musical repertoire spans three genres of music - *khayal*, *bhajan* and *ghazal*. Musical activity apart from singing is in domains of research (**Note 18**) in music therapy, music psychology and music-pedagogy, in addition to musical composition and teaching. I am happy to perform in concerts, though I am not a regular concert performer. On some occasions I do advocacy. This research, especially keeping myself at the center of it, that I do, is done with the intention that I share my recovery with others to help them create their pathways, in identical ways, within music or other artistic media, and is part of that advocacy. Amabile and colleagues (2005) define creativity as the production of novel, useful ideas or problem solutions. It refers to both the process of idea generation or problem solving or the actual idea or solution.

Musical engagement with an attitude to solving my 'problems' of life, survival, identity, voice and social acceptance have brought me into a position, where I may be seen as creative by some. Brain (as cited in Hare, 1987) suggests that though geniuses were probably not specially prone to insanity they were certainly more "nervous," and that when insanity occurred the commonest kind was "cyclothymia, the manic-depressive state".

Ghaemi (2011), on the other hand, believes that creativity may be about identifying problems, not solving them. Citing psychologists he adds, that creativity is a two-phase process: first, "the selection of the problem," a creative activity dependent on personality traits of the scientist (individual autonomy, independent-mindedness, personal flexibility, and openness to experience); second, the "extended effort to solve the problem," where persistence matters- the ability to keep going even when one's views are unpopular or unrewarded (here again one benefits from independence of character). I have worked alone for years, without any enabling musical or intellectual environment that institutions can provide for a musician and/or researcher, and the materials I have offered as testimony of it, are proof of this single-mindedness.

'Creativity is commonly taken to be a three stage process: the storing up of relevant information, (Johnson's "mind of large general powers"); mulling it over, more or less unconsciously (Gibbon's "solitude is the school of genius"); and flashes of insight, as novel coherencies enter consciousness ('eureka'). Brain noted that this rhythm is similar to that of cyclothymia, but it also may be likened to the basic biological rhythm of conception, gestation and birth (Hare 1987). In years of deep depressions, I studied quietly, sometimes only reading, without understanding. But whenever I got better, I would start thinking all over again about ideas that flashed in moments of inspiration. I did not learn *bhajan* or *ghazal* from my teachers, they are applications of my musical training in classical music.

Persistence is among those signs of creativity that I identify in myself. I hold any question in my hand for long and puzzle over it, not actively going in pursuit of any problem, more so in research and now in counseling. This attitude has helped me in a long span of time. I experienced a profusion of ideas during multiple episodes of mania, each of them clear enough to be developed into something useful. Being an artist, I chose to work within the arts, particularly in music and founded in 2010 a non-profit organization, Hansadhwani Foundation, to work in research in education and health via the arts. Ever since then I have been doggedly, single-handedly working in research, notwithstanding lack of support

from most quarters. It is my commitment to do what I believe in that I have worked without monetary rewards or even concern till yet.

My writing (**Note 19**) and research (**Note 20**), including this one, has been in areas where I have not received any formal training. I attribute my ability to work in these areas largely due to creativity and the 'integrative complexity' that Ghaemi refers to. He says that creative people see farther and wider; their cognitive peripheral vision is clearer, they make connections between seemingly disparate things that many of us miss. Elaborating - he says - that, those brief insights stay with you after you return to normal. When not manic or depressed, those with bipolar disorder are normal, just like everyone else, but they retain an awareness that makes their perception just different enough to be unusually creative (Ghaemi, 2011). From this fount of inspiration, I work in areas that are seemingly disparate, and hold hands of many.

DISCUSSION Artistic engagement can create new possibilities, including self-healing. Bringing music within the domain of health can completely transform the illness experience of a person. My writing is an attempt to share this potential: both within a person and within music. My attitude toward life has been an inquisitive, introverted and help-seeking one, even though I have chosen to decide whose help I want. Other people have always inspired me.

An important aspect of my recovery came from the realm of research, particularly the discovery of social constructionism and how it conceptualizes mental illness. Nobody recovers in isolation, for our pathologies and our recoveries come from a social realm. While mentally ill we lose our connections with the world around, and recede into an inner world, from where entry into the world outside becomes difficult for we lose our confidence, sense of direction and a purpose to live. However, the path to recovery lies in reconfiguring these connections once again. For anyone to recover, they have to look at multiple sources to heal their spirit, their minds, invest their time in, and create emotional bonds with. The arts and artistic expressions are a powerful media for emotional venting and anchoring, yet not an end in themselves, even for artists. We all have to establish connections with life itself, with other humans and make our contributions to the world we inhabit. That alone constitutes true recovery for anyone.

I have cited evidence from diverse domains, to show that it was a constellation of many resources that contributed to my recovery, not music alone. I also believe this self-healing via music was largely accomplished because musical engagement was at an occupational level, not just a traditionally therapeutic one mediated by a therapist. Musical creativity vented out my pain and I would experience the indirect rewards, of an expanded musical repertoire. Thanks to musical training, I could redirect extreme anguish away from being self-harming and toward creating music and getting the anguish out of me; letting those suicidal moments pass (Sharma, 2014).

I would like to re-emphasize that music by itself may not be therapeutic, even for musicians. But within music there are diverse elements, which if utilized in an integrated manner can bring about many changes in a progressive manner, through which people can bring order in their chaos. Laycraft (2009) cites Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration to explain mechanisms of human development for understanding gifted individuals. According to Dabrowski, positive disintegration is the mental development described by the process of transition from lower to higher levels of mental life and is stimulated by tension, inner conflict, struggle, anxiety, and despair. Though Laycraft offers her insights via chaos theory for gifted individuals, I extend its scope further, to those having mental illnesses. On the one hand, creativity and giftedness is well reported among those having mental illnesses, on the other hand this chaos can also be ordered into a new order by due facilitation. It is likely that if more people can utilize equally diverse elements themselves or be assisted by suitable others, the psychotic chaos can also be channelized toward newer equilibria. This article is a little contribution in illustrating this idea.

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NOTES

1. I am referring here only to the writing that I did after the onset of my 'illness' and nothing before.
2. I was fired from my job after the first issue of the magazine was published. The magazine itself wound up after the third issue!
3. Kabir was one of the most radical saint poets of 16th century India, who is popular till date. His poetry of devotion became my expression in myriad ways. I have documented the role played by his poetry in my musical expression and catharsis in many ways, including research in music therapy, as well as via my blog, that I started maintaining from 2009.
Link to: <http://merakabir.blogspot.in/>
The story of Kabir's contribution appeared as a publication in the *Canadian Journal of Music Therapy*, downloadable from- <https://hamsadhwani.academia.edu/PrateekshaSharma>
4. Here is a link that shares my musical training from the age of nine years
<http://prateekshalaya.wordpress.com/about/singing/my-training/>
5. A YouTube link to one- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uftcol7jWe0>
6. Some of them are part of this link- <http://prateekshalaya.wordpress.com/about/singing/scans-from-personal-history/>
7. I had support from a Jungian psychologist, had music teachers to guide my musical learning, my supportive parents, my dogs, my homeopath doctor and one senior academic, who mentored my research in a supportive manner- though there were no pathways waiting for me anywhere. Depending upon what input would be required at what time I knocked at that door, though despite so much help potentially available, one significant factor that contributed to my recovery was living alone from the age of 35 years, for the next few years. That gave me the scope for much creativity, despite the chaos. It was only in that solitude that I could fully accomplish this level of recovery and re-entry into life of a non-drug dependent person.
8. Most of the time I learnt with one teacher but during one phase I even learnt with two, as I was really very ill and I needed new ideas to keep my mind going. These two came from two different styles, which is considered a big taboo in Indian music, but for me the propulsion was not musical engagement alone.
9. A *raga* in Indian music is akin to a western musical scale, which can vary between five to seven notes.
10. *Khayal*, literally speaking, means a thought. For musical purposes *khayal* is a form of song, which can be a poetic version of an idea that can be rendered musically.
11. One of the principal languages of India.
12. On exceptional days I would write up to four-five poems a day as well, but they were unpredictable. On such days there would be no music and I would obsessively write for many hours.
13. *Bhajan* and *ghazal* are two different genres of music, to the extent that they are mutually exclusive. There are people who may exclusively specialize in any of them or even both. Usually they are not sung or performed in the same musical program, even if an artist has both as part of their repertoire. They are both considered 'light' music forms as opposed to the classical music of tradition.
14. Here is a link to my Kabir blog: <http://merakabir.blogspot.in/> which I started writing in 2009, and which recounts in some measure the work that I did over the years in Kabir's poetry. It also has a recent video from YouTube, my first, of one Kabir *bhajan*.
15. Bounded being is a phrase used by Kenneth Gergen (2009) to depict the isolated self which considers itself to be fundamentally estranged from everyone and which was the conception of human according to the Western civilization.
16. The name of that album is *Soz-e-Ghazal* and all the six tracks in it are my original compositions. They are all available on YouTube, put there by someone who liked them enough. One is attached as part of a note above.
17. *Riyaz* is a term used for practice in the Indian subcontinent, which refers to honing a musical/artistic piece by repeatedly practicing it, often over a hundred times.
18. In addition to this, I also work in research in social psychology, with particular emphasis on mental health.
19. I do not share my poetry publicly yet, except when I explicitly do so as part of my writing.
20. I wrote my first autoethnography, in the light of social constructionist view of mental illness, titled *Mending the Broken Frame: Self-Narration in a Constructionist Framework*. It is downloadable from my research site.

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